

## Review of *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific* by Christine Hong (Stanford University Press)

by [Annie Hui](#) | [Book Reviews](#), [Issue 11.1 \(Spring 2022\)](#)

**ABSTRACT** Christine Hong's *A Violent Peace* examines local and global democratization projects and the many ways that postwar US military tactics and strategies functioned to suppress both counterrevolutionaries abroad in Asia and Black radicals at home in the US. Through literary and visual analyses of works by Ralph Ellison, Ōe Kenzaburō, Miné Okubo, Carlos Bulosan, James Baldwin, and W. E. B. Du Bois, Hong questions how to navigate US post-World War II policies that claim a period of democratized "peace" and racial integration while simultaneously dehumanizing "foreign" bodies through military tactics that police cultural and political belonging.

**KEYWORDS** [Cold War](#), [militarism](#), [race](#), [democracy](#), [Asia](#)

*A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific*. By Christine Hong. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020, 320 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978-1-5036-1291-4. US List: \$30.00

In *A Violent Peace*, Christine Hong focuses on the blurring of local and global democratization projects and unpacks the ways that postwar US military tactics and strategies functioned both to quell counterrevolutionary movements in Asia, and to suppress Black radicals through domestic war operations. By looking at the intersections between domestic and foreign policing of dissent and the policies that ensured necropolitical efficiency, Hong theorizes US militarism's centrality to the political and cultural imagination of racialized peoples within an era of US military and imperial expansion abroad, and a rising police state at home. Drawing from works by key Asian, Asian American, and Black thinkers, artists, and writers, Hong argues for a reframing of US post-World War II policies to recognize that claims of global democratizing efforts and local racial integration were in fact military tactics that worked to police "foreign" bodies within the US imaginary.

Hong begins in chapter one, "'Democracy within the Teeth of Fascism': The Black POW and the Invisible War at Home in Ralph Ellison's War Writings," by focusing on the "invisible" war at home against Black Americans, the state's role in fostering racial inequality post-1945, and the fascist dimensions of US democracy in creating a racialized internal enemy. Framing her analysis through the works of Ralph Ellison, Hong argues that the democratic future of Black Americans rested on state-endorsed Black visibility and incorporation within "the constraints of hyperpatriotic military form" (39), echoing Claudia Jones's phrase "Jim Crow in uniform" (10). Hong reads Ellison's writing as making visible the "war within wars" (9)—or the struggle for Black freedom within the context of global wars—and as challenging the idea that Black Americans in uniform signal racial equality and inclusion.

Chapter two, "Revolution from Above: Ōe Kenzaburō, the Black Airman, and Occupied Japan," examines US military-imperial exploits in Asia and the Pacific. Considering Ōe Kenzaburō's literary works as exposés, Hong explores the complex racial and colonial dimensions of the postwar "Pacific theater" that highlight the contrast of racial liberalization within the US military, and illiberal expansionism in the Pacific. The symbolic resonance of military planes in Ōe's works illustrate the racial logic of asymmetrical warfare and the aerial threat that US national security posed to Japanese democracy. While the desegregation of the US military was hailed as evidence of democratic strength, Jim Crow policies at home and the US policies in occupied Japan spoke to the US war machine's fascist and necropolitical functions. Although the incorporation of racialized bodies in US military affairs created possibilities for "linking black pilot and Asian target" (59), this racial solidarity was premised on the common dehumanization of "foreign" bodies.

Chapter three, "A Blueprint for Occupied Japan: Miné Okubo and the American Concentration Camp," continues Hong's theme of "democracy within the teeth of fascism" (22) in the US and the Pacific by considering visualizations of the citizen-subject of Japan in Miné Okubo's drawings of interned Japanese Americans. Okubo's *Citizen 13660* illustrates the dehumanization of Japanese bodies and questions a carceral system that conflates race with the enemy. Hong argues that this logic of an "enemy alien" and "enemy nation" set the stage for a democratization project at home as a means to rehabilitate Japan and Japanese Americans. Okubo's commissioned portraits of camp life in *Fortune* magazine aligned with assimilationist objects precisely because they illustrated citizen and imperial subjects as "ripe for democratization" (82).

In chapter four, "Possessive Investment in Ruin: The Target, the Proving Ground, and the U.S. War Machine in the Nuclear Pacific," Hong presents varied sources of literature and art to unpack the memory of the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Marshall Islands. Hong begins by looking at GI tourism in Hiroshima to draw attention to the commercialization of the bodies of *Hibakusha* ("bomb-impacted person," or survivors of

the Nagasaki and Hiroshima atomic bombs), arguing that the romanticized narrative of US victory displaces that horror of atomic violence and plays to the US's investment in violence. Furthermore, Hong elaborates that the limited historical consciousness fostered by Hibakusha literature renders Hiroshima as an atrocity tale that disregards the need for redress or reparations. This in turn allowed for a future-oriented US narrative of postwar Japan, at once legitimating the bombing as "peaceful violence" and "atoms for peace" and "sutur[ing] democracy to the fearsome power of the American bomb" (113–4).

Chapter five, "People's War, People's Democracy, People's Epic: Carlos Bulosan, U.S. Counterintelligence, and Cold War Unreliable Narration," focuses on counterintelligence and "the idea of human terrain" (140) as seen through Carlos Bulosan's novels and other Filipino works about guerilla resistance to US military rule. Hong concentrates on guerilla warfare of the Philippine revolutionary struggle for democracy and national liberation and theorizes the "asymmetrical warfare's indiscriminate brutality" (138) as a "logic of indistinction" that conflates targets as their location. The legal distinction between civilian and combatant is blurred, as are the categorical differences between humans and terrain. For Hong, in "classic counterinsurgent fashion" (142), the rhetoric of terror was used by the Bush administration to justify US war and police power overseas.

Chapter six, "The Enemy at Home: Urban Warfare and the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam," continues Hong's discussion on counterinsurgency and revolutionary struggles for democracy at home. Hong draws on Black revolutionary discourse to illustrate the ways that human rights were envisioned as a weapon against imperialism. Racial counterintelligence, central in the US war in Vietnam, was equally crucial to the war at home, as it decided which groups and individuals endangered national security. The "perceived threat" of both Black bodies in US ghettos and the Vietnamese in villages abroad shows how racial profiling in the language of counterinsurgency presumes guilt not just by association, but by location. Again, this chapter attempts to reveal how, in postwar efforts, the turn to racial liberalism domestically and the integrationist aims in the Pacific were all carried out under the guise of multiracial democracy.

In the concluding chapter, "Militarized Queerness: Racial Masking and the Korean War Mascot," Hong calls attention to a queer legacy of militarized racial inclusion as seen in the Korean War. She looks at the Korean War mascot as performing necropolitical labor aimed at accommodating US military personnel overseas. Photographs of soldiers and child mascots reveal the eroticization of mascots and "imply uncertain and unsettling 'feelings' across the color line" (214). Hong notes that the South Korean camptown is not only a site of sexual exploitation, but also a racially queer space. She reads the camptown's shadow economy of sex trafficking and labor exploitation of Korean women and young girls and boys as a "liminal biopolitical space between nations" (217).

Hong's work expands the cultural archive of the nuclear Pacific and makes visible the story of race in Pax Americana to contend with the "dramas of democratization" that purport a period of peace. In showing how US military tactics and strategies are easily transposed from "unruly" populations at home to the "enemies" abroad, Hong's book greatly contributes to studies of the intersections between race, military, democracy, and cultural imaginings across fields ranging from Asian American studies, critical race studies, cultural studies, and comparative literature. Each chapter can be read as a standalone essay, which may be particularly useful for teaching purposes. Hong's work as a whole is an important contribution to the history of post-war US that recenters racialized humanity to illustrate the military-imperial violence that minimized the structures in which race was targeted, captured, and mobilized.

---

## Author Information

### Annie Hui

Annie Hui is a PhD candidate in the Cultural Studies program at George Mason University. Her research focuses on the political uses and implications of mass cultural images and symbols in contemporary social protest movements.

[View all of Annie Hui's articles.](#)

### Article details

Annie Hui, "Review of *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific* by Christine Hong (Stanford University Press)," *Lateral* 11.1 (2022).

<https://doi.org/10.25158/L11.1.8>

This article is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#). Copyright is retained by authors.

---

*Lateral* is the peer-reviewed, open access journal of the [Cultural Studies Association](#).

ISSN 2469-4053

